

far
east

Reporter

Some Aspects of
**THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION
IN A COMMUNE VILLAGE**

*As Experienced By
A Western Participant*

Elsie Fairfax Chalmeley



Some Aspects of
THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION
IN A COMMUNE VILLAGE

As Experienced by A Western Participant
By Elsie Fairfax Cholmeley

Foreign Workers Help Harvest A Village Rice Crop

I spent two weeks last fall in a village 70 kilometres southeast of Peking. I had volunteered to go there with a group of 40 other foreign workers to help the members of two production teams in the Dingfuzhuang People's Commune cut the biggest rice crop they had ever grown.

The two teams comprised the population of Baoanzhuang village where we lived in groups of three or four with peasant families, eating the same food and working the same hours in the fields, from sun up to sun down. We helped around the house, sweeping the yard, carrying water from the well, collecting dry leaves for fuel. Living with the family, working all day with the commune members and joining them at meetings after supper, we saw something of the cultural revolution in its rural aspects and learned how this village had been resurrected from nothing - from bare, blank poverty - through the struggle of its people.

For the last ten minutes of the bus ride from Peking the road was flanked by fields of rice stretching as far as the eye could see. Each field was surrounded by poplars and plane trees whose leaves shown yellow and golden in the autumn sun. Nearer the village orchards of pear added to the richness of colour with their deep, dark red leaves. The first thing I saw as we pulled up at the school house was a red paper banner over a door-way in the yard reading: "Meeting to recall past Bitterness and See the Sweetness of the Present". It signalled that here, as all over China, the cultural revolution was going on and that the people were digging deep the foundations of the socialist base and wiping out all hopes of the old exploiting classes for a restoration of their power.

The Village's Life in Pre-Liberation Days

The picture we got of Baoanzhuang village in the past was one of unmitigated misery. Two thirds of its 3200 mu* were owned by landlords as were most of the houses and all the trees. (Trees are important, for without them no man can build his own house.) Much of the soil is sandy or alkaline; the landlords grew wheat on the better land; on the poorer land the peasants grew peanuts and beans with tiny yields, and a little maize or wheat. The Yunting River, flowing along the western boundary of the county, with the river bed high above the land level, was a source of constant summer floods, for dykes and dams lay neglected. Summer floods not only destroyed crops and swept away houses; they also covered the land with a layer of sand, making it even more unproductive. And in the spring when rain was needed there were frequent droughts.

Living on the verge of starvation, many people fled to other places, while a few became bandits. Sixty percent of the villagers who remained were beggars, hired laborers or small pedlars. Of the families I talked to, all told similar stories. The Gu and Song families (both lower middle peasants) each had 20 mu of land. In each case, to make a little extra for minimal subsistence, one member went to work full time for the landlord and a second worked for the landlord in the slack season. Landlords promised food but gave only thin gruel or coarse grain. Payment to full time workers was at the year end, but many pretexts were found for "deductions" - for an animal lost or an implement broken. More often than not the laborer got nothing.

The Village's Life Today

Today all 124 families in Baoanzhuang, with 630 people, live in well-built houses with electric light. Food is plentiful though simple, mainly maize made into porridge or buns and eaten with salted turnips or cabbage. I was struck by the number of people wearing new padded jackets, and especially by how well the young people were dressed. I learned there are six families with sewing

*1 mu is 1/6 acre

machines and fifteen bicycles. In a neighboring village where fruit was the main crop there was a bicycle in every family; prosperity in Baoanzhuang is relatively recent, though catching up fast.

The big leap in Baoanzhuang began three years ago with the expansion of rice growing. The suggestion came from veteran farmers as a way to utilize unproductive land throughout the county. There was plenty of water in the Yunting River for irrigation, they said, and the flooding of the land for paddy rice would hold down the alkali.

Every able-bodied person in the village was mobilized to dig irrigation channels, build sluice gates, and level the land. The work could not all be done at once but by 1966 the village had 640 mu of paddy. This was increased to 1000 mu in 1967 and a further 200 mu will be added for the coming year. The yield, now standing at an average 600 jin* per mu will also rise as skill in cultivation improves. A rice expert from Shanghai is now living in the commune to give advice.

This year payment for a work day is being increased from 52 to 70 fen. Each person (man, woman and child) will get 400 jin of rice from the 600,000 harvested. (Threshing was not yet completed when I paid a second visit there at the end of November and this was given as a conservative figure).

One of the present difficulties is a shortage of labour, but as the harvests are gathered more funds become available for mechanization. Electric motors now pump water to the fields, turn threshers and mills, while tractors hired from a central station do most of the ploughing. All this in a village where agriculture, from ancient times until a dozen or so years ago, depended mainly on the hoe.

The Process of the Change

To understand how such changes could have taken place in so short a time, one has to understand not only the changes in state power and in the land-owning system but

* 1 jin is 1.1 lb

also the changes in the people's thinking, and the struggle between the socialist and the capitalist roads in the countryside.

The beginnings of the revolutionary consciousness and drive of the people of Baoanzhuang date back to the anti-Japanese War when in 1943 members of the underground Communist Party came to the area. They first helped the poor and lower-middle peasants to organize peasant unions which demanded rent reductions and higher wages; then a militia was organized to sabotage Japanese communication lines; later a regular guerrilla force was organized.

The landlords fled when Japan surrendered in August 1945, but they came back with the Kuomintang army to attack the people in May 1946. There then followed three years of arduous struggle, with the Kuomintang never able to hold more than highways and isolated strongpoints - while the people kept control in the countryside. In December 1948 when the Eighth Route Army surrounded Peking the county was liberated.

Many stories of these years were told us by an old guerrilla fighter, now a cadre in the county administration. He described in detail how the people from having no arms, armed themselves first with rifles and small weapons seized from their enemy, the landlords; and later with machine-guns captured from the Kuomintang army. He told of the hard life, sleeping much of the time in holes dug in the open fields, of the heroism of individual peasants, and the struggle waged to prevent the landlords getting the wheat harvest. It was a vivid picture of a people's war, and the overthrow of exploiters and oppressors.

The Cultural Revolution Process In A Commune Village

This experience as a guerrilla area stood the people of Baoanzhuang in good stead as they advanced along the road to collectivization after the liberation - for they had learned on whom they could rely and the need for constant vigilance against their class enemies. The continued class struggle and the need for vigilance was

brought home to us when we saw an exhibition of a local landlord's documents, including those illustrating his activities since the liberation.

The village schoolhouse room was crowded as we went in; as we edged forward we saw a pile of old land deeds, labour contracts, photographs, note-books and other items on the table. These possessions of the landlord had remained hidden until the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. They were found by the Red Guards in a Peking house in September 1966, among the effects of the son of Chang Feng-zao, the landlord who formerly owned 2000 mu of land, 670 of them around Baoanzhuang.

A young man standing behind the table was explaining with great feeling and indignation: "China's capitalist roaders say that the landlords and bourgeoisie have been eliminated and that rich peasants can't be found, that the class struggle no longer exists. Peng Chen, the former mayor of Peking, said that the former landlords are now no different from ordinary members of the people's communes, and that some of them have become very good workers. But from these exhibits", he said, as he picked up a field map made by the landlord after liberation to keep a record of where his property lay, "you see whether or not there is still class struggle and a struggle between the two roads-socialism and capitalism".

Before the liberation this Chang Feng-zao lived in a mansion with 200 rooms, laid out like a palace. In addition to servants he had 200 armed men to protect him and extort money and grain from the peasants - in exorbitant rent, taxes and interest on loans. At one end of his compound he had a pawnshop, a grocery and a cloth store. An entry in his diary boasted: "I have innumerable horses and cows, and silver dollars in a small mound". After the land reform Chang did not give up. He kept all his title deeds instead of handing them in as the People's Government required, and, just to make sure, copied them in tiny writing into a note-book one inch square. He also made records of all his claims for money loans, rent, grain

loans and interest debts. He kept these in his Peking house and when he died in 1957 they passed on to his son, Chang Kuo-chen.

Chang Kuo-fen changed his name and got a job teaching in a Peking secondary school. Even though he was set in feudal habits - he made his students greet him with the traditional "bow to the ground" each New Year - he somehow managed to slip through all the revolutionary movements that preceeded the Cultural Revolution. He was then exposed as a typical "time bomb" of the old ruling class. On the one hand he had the audacity to write a 20,000 word autobiography which he submitted with an application for membership in the Communist Party. On the other hand, when the Red Guards entered his house they found not only his father's documents but also three Kuomintang flags that he hung in his back room on Kuomintang National Day, along with scrolls with reactionary slogans. On one he had even written "Long Live Chiang Kai-shek!" And during the hard years (1959-62) he jotted down in his diary such sentiments as "China is a country of queues" and "Present progress doesn't compare with past freedom".

The exhibition at the school house was a glaring example of the tenacity with which the ruling class, when kicked out, schemes for a restoration of its power. This was well understood by the former poor and lower-middle peasants of Baoanzhuang who in all the years since liberation have held to the road of collectivization. It gave deep feeling to the words of old and young commune members at this evening meeting held to discuss and condemn the actions of today's capitalist roaders.

The speeches were short and concrete and to the point. One old peasant who said he was illiterate announced that he wished to comment on the statement made by "China's Krushchev" that "exploitation has its merits". Getting angrier and angrier as he described the conditions under which he as a boy had had to look after the landlord's pigs, he wound up, "Whenever I hear mention of 'exploitation has its merits' I am almost too furious to speak".

The team leader talked of the influence of the capitalist roaders that had led some of the peasants in the hard years (1959-62) to open up land for private plots; they gave more and more time to the cultivation of these; and then new problems arose, as, for example, how could they obtain more manure. This harmed the collective. "Selfishness is the source of all that is rotten", he ended, "we must get rid of it. Only so can we repudiate revisionism and follow Chairman Mao's line".

The combatting of selfishness was taken up on another evening devoted to the study of Mao Tse-tung's article on Norman Bethune, the Canadian surgeon who gave his life while serving the Chinese people during the war against Japan. After discussing the spirit in which Bethune worked, the team members made comparisons with themselves, bringing out attitudes and actions which had resulted in losses for the brigade.

Two girls described how during the rice transplantation they had set out the shoots too thin because they were trying to win more work-points, which were allotted on the basis of the area planted. They even tried to oust from their group a girl who insisted on doing a conscientious job. A mechanic said he had neglected to make small repairs to farm machines that would keep them in tip-top running order, and had left machines standing uncovered in the rain. An accountant, in order not to offend people, had allowed small, unnecessary expenditures to be made. A carpenter had wanted to call an outside man in to make a cart, feeling the job was too heavy to do himself.

From all we saw and heard we got a deep impression of the tremendous amount this village, like all other Chinese villages, has done to change its surroundings over the past years.

And today the people of this village, like people all over China, are tackling an even more difficult problem - that of changing their outlook, of fighting against self-interest, of repudiating revisionism.

January 1968.

FAR EAST REPORTER
Publications

Issues on The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Some Aspects of The Cultural Revolution In A Commune Village	By Elsie Fairfax Cholmeley	25¢
China's Economic Health and The Great Proletarian Revolution	By Maud Russell	40¢
The Seizure of Power In China's Socialist Society	By Israel Epstein	35¢
China's Genuine Democracy Among The Communes of Mao Tier	By Rewi Alley	30¢
Mass Democracy in China	By Israel Epstein	
Some Background on The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution	By Maud Russell	50¢
The Making of New Man	By Tuan Ping-li	30¢
On The Influence of the Thought of Mao Tse-tung	By Rewi Alley	25¢

These seven issues for Two Dollars
(To one address)

Issues on Medicine in China

Traditional Medicine in Communist China: Science, Communism & Cultural Nationalism	By Ralph C Croizier	50¢
An Observation on Acupuncture in China	By Felix Mann	40¢
Acupuncture - The Scientific Evidence	By Dr Han Su-yin	25¢
Oriental Renaissance in Education & Medicine	By Dr Wilder Penfield	25¢
Art & Science in China (2 articles on Acupuncture)		50¢
Medicine & Public Health in China		25¢
Compiled from AAAS 1960 Symposium on Communist China		

These six issues for Two Dollars
(To one address)

For other issues on China: see back cover

Issues on Southeast Asia

Whither India?	By Maud Russell	35¢
The Impact of US Current Policy On Phillipine "Independence"		50¢
The "new Era" in the Philippines		25¢
New Light on the Korean War		15¢
Some Background on the United States In Viet Nam and Laos		25¢
Some Background on the United States In Southeast Asia: Maphilindo		25¢
Malaysia	By Abdul Rahim Alavi	30¢
Arena of International Conflict		
Asians Speak Out On US "Aid" Policy and Programs: Pakistan	By Hamza Alavi	30¢
US Aid to Pakistan		
An Evaluation		
Cambodia	By Han Su-yin	
Why Cambodia Rejected US Aid		
In Southeast Asia Today		25¢
Poems	By Rewi Alley	
The War In Vietnam	By Hugh Deane	50¢

All ten issues for \$2.50
(To one address)

FAR EAST REPORTER

Annual Subscription \$2.00

Making available significant facts and analyses contributed by competent writers on
the Far East

MAUD RUSSELL, Publisher P.O. Box 1536, New York, N.Y. 10017



FAR EAST REPORTER PUBLICATIONS

For issues on The Cultural Revolution, Medicine in China,
and Southeast Asia: see inside

Mass-Line Leaders & Leadership in Rural China	40¢
By Isabel & David Crook	
The Process of Urban & Rural Economy in China	35¢
By D Crook & Shirley Wood	
The Past in China's Present	60¢
By Joseph Needham	
Why Washington Sees China As The "Enemy"	40¢
By Maud Russell	
"Seeing Is Believing"	25¢
By An American POW in China	
Some Observations on Education, Trade & Political Process in China	40¢
By Dr Oldham, J R Love & Anna Louise Strong	
Letters From Friends in China	30¢
Some Facts About Today's Tibet	30¢
By Stuart & Roma Gelder	
China Speaks For Herself: 1964 Interviews of Foreign Correspondents with Chou En-lai	25¢
China In Today's World: "Economic Failure"?! "Opposing Peaceful Coexistence"?! "Isolated"?! "Threat To Asian Neighbors"?!	50¢
By Maud Russell	
China 1963: Food Medicine People's Communes	50¢
By Rewi Alley, Wilder Penfield, D Crook, AL Strong	
China-India Conflict	60¢
By Maud Russell	
Report from the UN: China Debate	25¢
By Susan Warren	
China Facts For American Readers: Correcting Popular Tales	25¢
By Rewi Alley, I Epstein Felix Greene	
As China Sees US Policy: Chapter 26 of "Awakened China	50¢
By Felix Greene	
The World Belongs To All	25¢
Liao Hung-ying & D Bryan	
China's Path To Her New Society	25¢
PM Chou En-lai - Felix Greene Interview 1960	25¢
"Why Do Chinese 'Refugees' 'Escape' To Hongkong?"	
By M Russell & ALS Strong	15¢
China and India? and Indonesia? and Burma?	
By Maud Russell	50¢
New People In New China	35¢
By Maud Russell	

Any six issues for \$2.50
(To one address)